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Springfield Township High School

**Graduation Project Annotated Bibliography**

**Annotation 1**

**MLA Citation:**

Reutter, Mark. "Bullet Trains for America?." *The Wilson Quarterly* 33.4 (2009): 26-33. Print.

**Information:**

Mark Reutter is a current Fellow at the Progressive Policy Institute, a liberal think tank. Reutter has published articles for *The Wilson Quarterly, The Nation,* as well as *The Baltimore Sun*. Some of Reutter’s achievements as an author include the book *Making Steel: Sparrows Point and the Rise and Ruin of American Industrial Might*. In “Bullet Trains for America” Reutter writes an informational and persuasive piece. He informs the reader of current rail projects in Europe, Asia, and America, but also attempts to persuade the reader to get behind American investment in high-speed rail infrastructure. This article appeals to both experts in the field and lay people. It uses some technical language, but the message and information is clear.

* In order to revamp America’s railways President Obama has proposed a plan, which involves upgrading existing rail to high-speed capacities, and building new lines with speeds similar to European and Asian trains
  + Could be similar to the Interstate Highway System, which was developed under President Eisenhower
* Obama’s plan focuses on ten rail corridors that would each have potential to have a high-speed railway
* Reservations to the high-speed rail plan come from Congressmen and women who feel that these investments would not be self-sustaining and their price would not be covered by user fees (Reutter 29)
* Benefits
  + Reduce traffic congestion
  + Promote economic development
  + Create jobs
  + Save energy and cut greenhouse gasses
    - Up to two million tons annually could be cut
* Toll roads could serve as an example for high-speed rail
  + Toll roads in the NE corridor have been profitable, but in less densely populated areas this is not always true

**Thesis or main idea:**

“The result is that train service is slower today than it was in the 1940s, when ‘streamliners’ touted for their speed…routinely topped 90 to 100 MPH between station stops. While the rest of the world has advanced, America’s passenger rail has stalled, if not reversed direction”

**Summary of main arguments:**

The main argument of this report is that American railways have fallen behind Europe and Asia because of a lack of money and infrastructure. While America has paved ahead in a modern interstate highway system, the high price of gas in Europe and Asia has made this difficult. In order to provide transportation European and Asian governments have invested in high-speed rail cars, tracks, and other required infrastructure. The paper also argues that an increase in high-speed rail has economic benefits for small towns and businesses, as well as allowing people to commute farther distances to work. Reutter cites that “in Europe, high-speed railroads have generated the most growth in provincial cities, as once remote districts benefit from their newfound closeness to hubs such as Paris and Berlin” (Reutter 30). Reutter also argues that European and Asian railways have had more success than American ones because of dedicated rail lines specifically built for high-speed passenger rail. Europe and Asia are able to invest in these things because rail shipping is not a big industry in Europe and Asia.

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**Summary of evidence:**

High-speed trains have been able to take hold in Europe and Asia because “passenger trains are dominant and railroads carry a relatively small proportion of all freight—the reverse of the situation in the United States” (Reutter 31). High-speed rail in Spain averages a top speed of 146 MPH, whereas Amtrak’s fastest train, the Acela, only averages 67 MPH (Reutter 27).

Critics argue that high-speed rail in Europe and Asia are not always profitable and require large government subsidies to keep them afloat (Reutter 30). However, these railways still maintain a high number of riders due to expensive gasoline and toll roads.

Developing high-speed rail in America has been hindered not only by cost, but also by strict regulations from the Federal Railroad Administration. The FRA’s decision to make trains slower and safer has not allowed for infrastructure to be adapted. Another thing holding back upgraded rail lines are freight company’s lack of interest in upgrading the rail they own and on which Amtrak operates. High-speed rail requires different tracks, safety systems, and controls that current American infrastructure cannot provide (Reutter 30).

**Evaluation:**

In “Bullet Trains for America?” Mark Reutter does a good job at presenting why America has fallen behind in the world of high-speed rail. The research that Reutter cites is good because it cites historical data that points to different cause and effect chains that lead to the current situation. Reutter does a good job at presenting both the pro and con sides of the debate over whether or not America should invest in these technologies. Reutter is slightly biased towards being in favor of high-speed rail, but he does a good job at evaluating the critic’s opinions and explaining their rationale.

**Reflection:**

I believe that this source will be helpful for my research. I think that Reutter does a good job at providing adequate information about the topic of high-speed rail. While my project is not going to specifically focus on high-speed rail, as it becomes more and more of a political topic it will have influence on regional rail. It is important for me to have a good understanding of the political climate that surrounds high-speed rail. High-speed rail needs money from the government, without this it will not be successful. Going forward information like this will help me understand why development for SEPTA is slow and not very fast. Information in this article will also help me compare SEPTA to European and Asian railways and name the pros and cons of each.

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